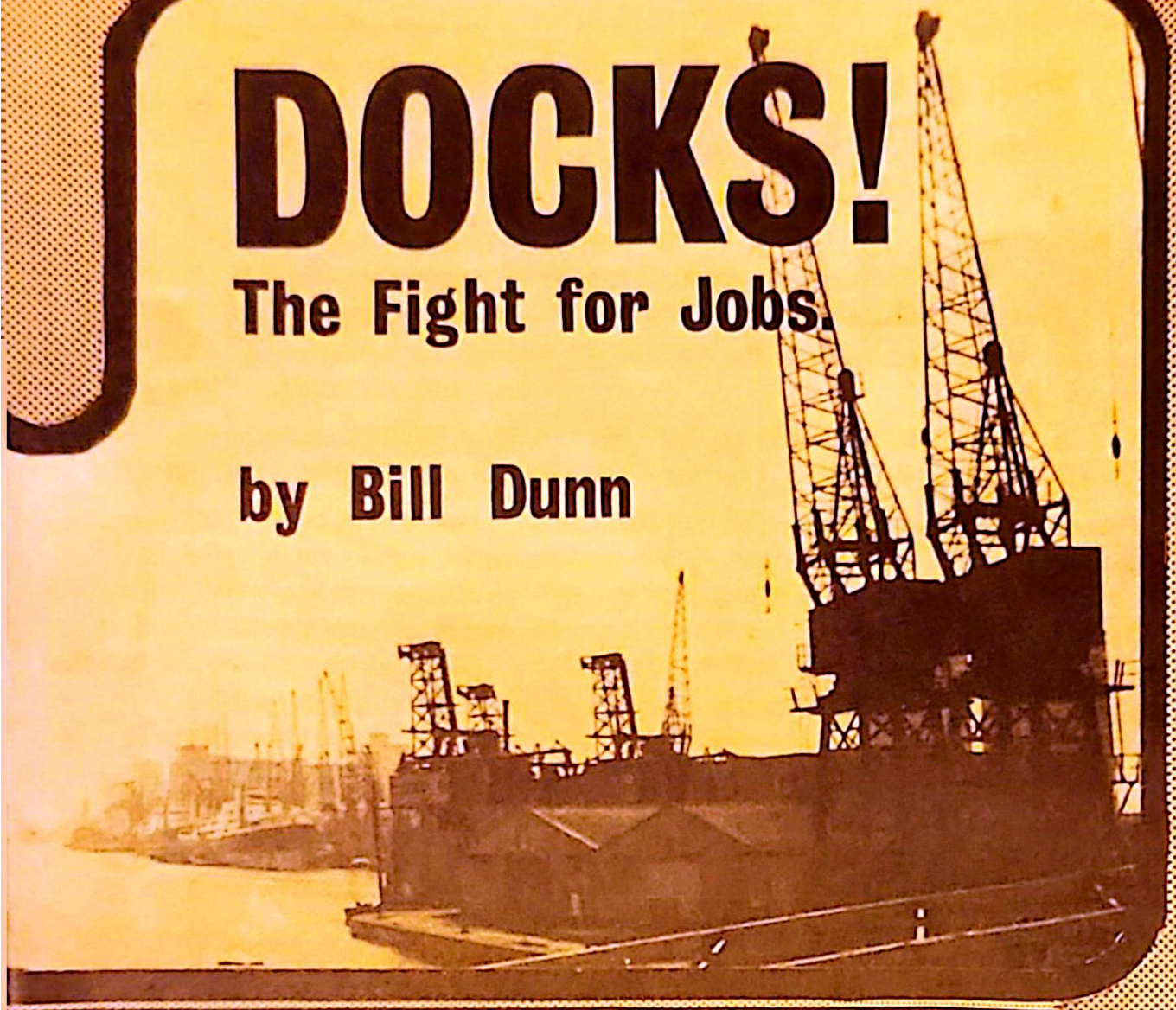
DOCKS!

The Fight for Jobs.

by Bill Dunn



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DOCKERS

With a million unemployed workers in Britain, what is the future for dockers? It is a fair question — especially when you bear in mind that in the last five years the number of dockers has dropped from 60,000 to 44,000.

That means that one in four has lost his job, and if the employers get their way, there is more to come.

Throughout Britain it has not only been dockers who are under attack and affected by unemployment; but printers, engineers, miners, railway workers.

The Tories are deliberately maintaining high unemployment by reducing purchasing power of the people. Rising prices, rents, fares — all reduce the value of the money in the pockets of the workers. Some sections of workers such as U.C.S., Plesseys and the Miners have shown the only way to fight the employers and the Government's policies — is by taking action.

Dockers are already showing that this lesson must be learnt — that the way to defeat the employers and the Government's plans is by action; that the time to take action against sackings is while you're at work — not after you're outside the gate.

The fact is that the Tories need large scale unemployment to carry through their declared aims of bludgeoning workers and the trade unions into accepting the operation of the Industrial Relations Act, keeping wages down, building up a surplus in the balance of payments so as to cut the cost of investment in Britain and increase investment in the Common Market and overseas.

Tory claims that the economy is about to be lifted up are simply not true. The facts show it; unemployment has grown consistently for the past six years, and is still increasing.

Every industrialist admits that, with the existing technical resources, production could be increased by 10%, without any increase in the number of people at work! In the docks, the employers estimate that they can easily increase present throughput by some 25% before the present labour force would be fully extended.

Unemployment and the misery that goes with it has always been a feature of capitalism. But over the last few years the capitalists, Tories and right wing labour leaders, have used the big technological developments in industry to bring unemployment to new record levels.

THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT 1965–70

The Labour Government brought in the selective employment tax and redundancy payments, demanded more and more mergers, tried to impose wage freeze, increased prices and devalued the currency.

THE EMPLOYERS

The Employers took full advantage. They kept wage increases down, put prices up, amassed fantastic profits, spent some of it on technical development, and with union agreements brought about 'productivity' deals which increased

the productivity of each individual worker, which paid for increases in wages but sacrificed jobs.

LOOK AT THE FACTS

Dockers like all other sections of workers are suffering the outcome of these policies. No port has escaped the axe. The table below shows the decline of manpower in all the major ports even over the past 12 months alone – while the amount of goods handled has actually increased:–

	Registered Dock Labour			
	1969	1970		
London	18,259	16,573	–	9.2%
Liverpool	11,430	10,789	–	7.0%
Hull	3,544	3,126	–	12.0%
Manchester	1,959	1,861	–	5.0%
South Coast (including Southampton)	1,851	1,728	–	7.0%
Nationally (all ports)	48,785	44,588	–	9.0%

NO ACCIDENT – BUT PLANNED

Over the past years the ports and shipping have undergone major changes, with modernisation schemes and containerisation.

The McKinsey Report forecast that whereas under conventional handling of cargo, one man could unload 30 freight tons a week, with containerisation that would increase to 600 freight tons per week. This means 20 times more work without any increase in the labour force.

THE SHIP OWNERS through THE NATIONAL PORTS COUNCIL decided their policy long ago to facilitate the big changes being brought about by the major shipping companies of containerisation and increased profits at the same time.

They set out to:

* **Modernise loading and unloading for a quicker turn round of ships.**
* **Increase the profitability of the docks by higher charges – to be offset by a quicker turn round of shipping.**
* **Reduce manpower and make the labour force more flexible and interchangeable.**
* **Control wages by ending piecework systems and allowances for increased tonnage handling under containerisation and modern technical development without corresponding wage increases**
* **Sell off land at high prices or be part of new development schemes and so reduce the dock, the jobs, and increase the value of their holdings.**

THE EMPLOYERS ARE NEVER SATISFIED

The employers got the co-operation of the trade unions in pushing through

productivity deals; they got a smaller labour force; they got increased output; they got bigger profits; yet they still claim that the viability of the major ports is being undermined and that there are still too many dockers.

On the Merseyside, the latest agreement differs from the London one substantially, with earnings related to throughput, although there is provision for the transfer of labour from firm to firm, and the employers intend to use the Pool in the Liverpool area in the same way as it has been used in London over the last two years.

The employers claim that in London costs have risen by some 35% and it is taking longer to turn ships round and to unload; that dockers instead of increasing output are only working at normal rate.

On Tuesday, December 14th 1971, the London Dock Employers made the demand of compulsory severance payment — the right to give dockers the sack. They have now offered increased severance pay up to £2,330 for voluntary sacking, so desperate are they to reduce the number of workers employed in the docks, and increase profits. What price the employers pledge in safeguarding the National Dock Labour Scheme!

JOBS AND THE SCHEME IN DANGER

According to 'The Port', 15th January 1970, Mr. George Cattell, speaking in his capacity as independent chairman of the National Ports Modernisation Committee, estimated that by 1975 Britain's labour force in the docks would be 'considerably below 35,000'.

He questioned the future of the Dock Labour Scheme by asking **'Are we seriously to preserve a kind of closed shop for the sons of mechanical conveyor operators, forktruck drivers, button pushers, systems analysis and container controllers, merely because their ancestors were registered dockers?'**

What arrogant contempt for dockers and their families this statement reveals! It will lead many dockers to draw the conclusion that they don't want to preserve the sort of system which gives Cattell and his class their positions of privilege in society.

Mr. Cattell's view and the statement of the Liverpool employers that by 1972 they would require only 6,850 dockers; the vicious Tory Government policy of creating a million and more unemployed workers; this is the very real background against which future employment and the scheme are the major questions confronting dockers.

WHO HAS GAINED FROM THE CHANGES ?

It is clear, that with the new systems of loading and unloading, dockers do not want to work themselves out of jobs, or to see the industry which has been built out of the strength and sacrifices of the workers, dismantled in the traditional areas and **erected elsewhere on the basis of cheaper labour outside the National Dock Scheme.**

The real crux of the matter is that the employers and the National Dock Council use every argument and technical change taking place in shipping, with

container dock-berths being developed in Tilbury, Southampton and Seaforth, to reduce the organised labour force in the industry, encouraging the development of unregistered Ports like Felixstowe, Shoreham, Newhaven and Dover, using non-registered labour to attack the very safeguards for the future which dockers have fought for over the years.

The employers see big new possibilities for higher profits opening up with entry into the Common Market, with ports in the South East and the small coastal ports gaining at the expense of the traditional ports. That is why millions upon millions of pounds are being invested. The Channel tunnel is seen as a further method which could accommodate one fifth of non-fuel cargo between Europe and Britain.

Ronald Holloway in Lloyds Bank Review Jan. 1971, when speaking of cost containment said ... **'The country could stand up to a National Dock Strike more easily if a Channel tunnel were in operation and the balance of payments position completely beyond doubt'...** Talking of a tunnel, coastal ports and air transport etc., he said ...**'Increased competition on this scale would not help the ports revenues. Competition, however is probably essential to any long term solution of their labour troubles ...'**

With all this, the employers see by these developments the opportunity to break down the traditional solidarity of dockers by splitting and dividing them.

THROUGHPUT

Despite the dramatic reduction in the Docks labour force, throughput at docks has increased even over the past 12 months when Britain's industry has been working below capacity and unemployment has grown.

Docks Traffic	**Millions of Tons**	
	1969	1970
London	55	56
Milford Haven	39	41 (all oil)
Liverpool	29	29
Southampton	29	27
Medway	25	26

Alongside this, there has been the development of the small ports such as Felixstowe where in 1967 total traffic amounted to 1,242,678 tons and in 1970 had increased to 2,259,981 tons. £6.5 millions has been invested in a new container terminal and facilities for general cargo, yet the labour force of dockers is not registered with the National Dock Labour Board. The Port authorities have increased charges by more than 100% in London, 50% in Liverpool, and in other ports. This has speeded the development towards containerisation, while trade has been transferred from the traditional docks to other ports and container depots manned by non-registered labour doing dock work. The P.L.A. are having a bonanza with the sale of land from the London Dock Area – to quote just two examples:–

They had 850 acres on the market at £60,000 per acre which rose four times its previous value in 3 years after development. A further site in Bermondsey rose in price in 5 years from £25,000 and was sold for £250,000.

CONTAINERISATION GONE MAD !

The Shipping Owners who are on the royal road of fabulous profits are as callous of the effect on the lives of dockers as they have traditionally been to the seamen they directly employ. The container ships carrying more tonnage are being allowed to pick and choose which ports and docks they will unload at irrespective of acute problems they create for dockers, their families and the surrounding community.

They are laying down demands and conditions, not far removed from blackmail. For example, Mr. D.J. Nielson of the Palm Line Ltd., warned Southampton (Lloyds List 25.3.71) that they had started new services before at other ports and had abandoned them because for various reasons the Ports did not come up to expectation.

The Hull Dockers are to lose the Ben Line amounting to 6 ships a month and instead container ships will sail from Southampton to Japan and the Far East.

It is estimated that 90% of the general cargo trade between this country and Australia and 80% of that between Britain and the Atlantic Ports of the U.S.A. will be carried in containers reducing by 50% existing general cargo berths and concentrating trade in fewer ports.

CONTAINER BERTHS AND FUTURE UNEMPLOYMENT

The containerisation programme being developed at break neck speed, shows there can be no doubt that it would require much more than a 25% increase in throughput in order to bring the number of men on the Pool down if working conditions in the docks remain as they are today.

With all the talk about containerisation, Lloyds List March 29th, 1971, wrote – **'With more and more plans going before the National Ports Council For new container berths and terminals, questions are now being asked in shipping circles: Are there going to be too many container terminals in the British Isles for the amount of trade available?' How stupid can you get!**

Tory policies and technical developments together are putting the squeeze on the workers, on their jobs, wages and living conditions. These policies can only be defeated with a united struggle which the workers must win if they are to maintain and improve their living standards.

TIME TO GET ANGRY !

The present position is very serious and demands action. Higher severance pay is no answer to unemployment in the Docks, or to work going to non-registered labour and Ports.

We have to defeat the attempt of the Government and employers to create conditions in industry which will play region against region, port against port, railway workers and lorry drivers against dockers and lightermen.

What is needed is:

A. National Transport Policy embodying Rails, Road, Docks and Shipping.

B. One Policy covering all Ports.

C. The uniting of the Trades Unions with joint committees at all levels to discuss common problems and policy matters.

A POLICY TO FIGHT FOR !

We suggest a policy on the following lines would be in the interest of all Dockers:—

1. From all trade unions, the demand should be that there shall be no sackings, no redundancies of any kind, and for 100% defence of the National Dock Labour Scheme. Bring all ports and all workers under the National Dock Labour Scheme.

2. The end of the Pool system as a labour exchange within the docks as it exists today. The employers are using this system as a vast reserve of unemployed labour at £20 per week, which they would like to use as a threat to working dockers.

   The Pool should be used as intended – that is, as a temporary measure for a short period until the men are allocated to other employers.

   While in the Pool, men should get the average wages of the port concerned.

3. The trade unions should insist that all work known traditionally to be dock work should be again claimed by the unions, in line with the Bristow Report recommendations which the Labour Government failed to make public. In Liverpool some firms have agreed all stuffing to be dockers work. Stuffing and stripping should everywhere be governed by Dockers agreements. All container ports and depots should belong to the docks and come under the National Dock Agreement, and only national dock labour registered men should be working within them.

4. The traditional dock areas – upon which thousands of families throughout Britain depend for their living standards – should be extensively developed and trade planned for these ports by the National Port Authority, instead of new ports being developed to suit the employers and shipping companies. The shipowners should be told where to discharge their cargoes, and not allowed to play Ducks and Drakes with jobs, with the consequent disruption of domestic and social life.

5. 30 Hour Week based on two six hour shifts, 4 week summer holiday plus 1 week at Christmas; retirement at 60 years of age, on a minimum 70% average earnings. An immediate demand for a substantial wage increase.

6. Fight for the industry to be Nationalised and for all agreements to be National. It was a disgrace that the Labour Government did not nationalise the docks industry instead of spending its energy and time on trying to bring about the Industrial Relations Bill which split and divided the Labour Party from the trade union movement.

Only nationalisation both of docks and shipping, in fact, give workers the power which is necessary for them to organise the industry both in the interests of the country as a whole and the dockers and seamen in particular.

However, to do this today, means that the working class, and the dockers especially, must reject all the arguments put forward over the years of talking to get us to co-operate with the bosses for productivity and so called national interest. There are two nations in Britain with irreconcilable conflict of interests – the interests of the capitalist class who want only profits – not unloading ships or building homes, and the interests of the working class who are the majority and want a decent life for their families.

FIGHT ALL THE WAY – TIME TO MAKE A REAL CHANGE !

The real truth is that the Government and the employers are not the slightest bit concerned for the welfare of the workers. They are concerned only with their profits and their class.

The miners, the U.C.S. workers have stood out as giants confronting and defeating the Tories and employers.

There is now a new spirit among working people, coming from a growing understanding of the old slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all'.

The Tories and their press, their T.V. channels, turn out propaganda to try and make workers believe that Edward Heath and his Government are cultured and civilised because he can afford to buy and sail yachts, when more than one million workers and their families suffer the dole queues. They talk about democracy and the rights of individuals, and then clobber the Trade Unions, deny you the right to vote on Britain's entry into the Common Market; talk about unity of the British people, but want to deny you the right to black work in unity with your mates having to fight employers and the government for decent living standards.

The Tory Government, like the previous right wing Labour Government, attacks the people on behalf of big business on the assumption that what is good for the investors is good for Britain. The Stock Exchange sharks buy and sell – and close – factories, without a moment's thought on the consequences for working class families

THE TORIES MUST GO !

If the mighty united strength of the workers and the labour movement were used in the way it could and should be, this Tory Government could be removed from office.

This is why the Communist Party urges all workers to fight for a General Election now, and the defeat of the Tories.

We want to see the election of a new Labour Government, firmly committed to left wing policies in the interests of the working class.

Such a policy would include:–

- **Higher wages and Pensions.**
- **No Sackings – the right to work.**
- **Repeal the Industrial Relations Act.**
- **Take over and Nationalise the big trusts.**
- **Scrap the Tory Immigration Act and Rent Measures.**
- **Tax Wealth, extend the Social Services.**
- **Cut Arms Expenditure by at least 50%.**
- **Democratic and Civil Rights in Northern Ireland.**
- **No sell out to Smith in Rhodesia.**
- **Keep Britain out of the Common Market.**

WHY CHANGE CANNOT COME WITHOUT THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The Communist Party is a revolutionary Party, not because we say so, but because the policy we stand for would end the domination of a small clique of financiers and monopolists over the mass of the people.

We would make it impossible for speculators to raise land and house prices over 20% over 12 months – as has happened in the last year.

Unemployment would be a crime and workers would not be sacked. Instead, new industries would be developed and living standards would rise. The strength of our Communist Party is our belief in the organised working class movement – the trade unions, the Labour Party, and Shop Stewards' Committees.

We believe that all sections of workers, the Trade Unions, the Shop Stewards, Labour and Communist Parties, working together have the brains, knowledge and strength to build a society of socialism which will bring to an end the power of the parasites of Britain.

That is why the Communist Party works for the strengthening of the Trade Unions fighting for militant and socialist policies. That is why we applaud the shop stewards of the docks, miners, engineering, building and other industries, for their continued struggles on behalf of the working people.

We are so confident in the power of the people to understand and fight for what is right, that we never compromise on principles like racialism and the right to work, etc. We firmly believe that it is only the working-class as a whole who can make the necessary fundamental changes, despite individual rogues who get into leadership and backward workers who blackleg.

We have confidence in the future and believe in the power of a united, militant, working class to overcome the capitalist class and build a new society of Socialism.

THAT'S NO SECRET!!

Well, join with us and make it more widely known.

DO YOU READ THE MORNING STAR?

Everyone paid tribute to the role of the Morning Star during the miners' strike. Unlike the other papers which are owned by the bosses, the Morning Star stood by the miners right through the struggle, opening its columns to the leaders of the N.U.M. to put their case before the people. What it did on the miners' strike, it does for dockers, and on every issue affecting ordinary working people. It is a newspaper dedicated to ending this out-dated capitalist system. It is a newspaper for socialism. It campaigns daily to clear the Tories out, and replace them by a Labour Government committed by the mass movement to socialist policy. You can't afford to be without it. Buy it today and every day, price 4p, from all newsagents.

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